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FROM

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Hartford



Cover

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JOHN FITCH

A Native of Windsor, Connecticut

The first to invent and successfully apply steam propulsion of vessels through water



JOHN FITCH

The first in the World's History to In-
vent and apply Steam Propulsion
of Vessels through water.

BORN,

January 21, 1743 in Windsor (now South Windsor) Connecticut.

DIED,

July 2, 1798 and was buried in Bardstown, Kentucky.

Compiled for the Admiral Bunce Section, Hartford, Conn., No. 42, of the
National Navy League of the United States. -

Hartford
PUBLISHED MARCH 1912

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F. B. Allen,
Hartford.

To _____

With the compliments of the Admiral Bunce Section, No. 42,
Hartford, Conn., of the National Navy League of the United States.

FRANCIS B. ALLEN,
Chairman.

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Press Committee.

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**Press of R. S. PECK & CO., Inc., 26-28 High Street,
HARTFORD, CONN.**

FOREWORD.

The genius of John Fitch found expression in the field of mechanics. Singular as it may seem, living from boyhood in an inland agricultural town, he became obsessed and possessed with the idea of steam propulsion of vessels through water, and at a time in the world's history when the only known way was by sails or oars.

Fitch's finances seem to have been limited to his earnings. Nor did he have influence sufficient to enlist capital, at a time when the country had been nearly impoverished by the Revolutionary war, and doubtless his ideas were deemed chimerical, and he, a visionary; yet he struggled and triumphed over all obstacles, and successfully demonstrated the practicability of his wonderful invention, which dates back to April, 1785. Sole and exclusive rights in navigable waters were granted Fitch in 1786 by the state of New Jersey for his invention, and in 1787 the states of Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia granted Fitch similar rights.

After the adoption of the constitution of the United States in 1789, letters-patent were granted Fitch by the Federal Government, August 26, 1791, signed by President Washington, and by Thomas Jefferson, Henry Knox and John Randolph, Commissioners. The destruction of the U. S. Patent Office by fire in 1836 was unfortunate in this, that details of Fitch's invention cannot now be obtained.

Fitch's rights in navigable waters granted him by the state of New York in 1787 were, by reasons alleged of death, or non-use, repealed in 1798, and these rights conferred conditionally, upon Robert R. Livingston of New York. Up to April 5, 1803, Livingston's efforts towards steam propulsion of vessels, along the line of Fitch's invention, were fruitless. Robert Fulton had also been experimenting along the same line, but without success, and these conditional rights transferred to Livingston, were extended April 5, 1803, by Legislative enactment, to embrace Fulton. This period was

eighteen years after Fitch's invention and twelve years after letters-patent were granted Fitch by the Federal Government. Fulton's first steamboat, the "Clermont," was not launched until 1807. Fulton, himself, never claimed priority of invention for steam propulsion of vessels through water.

John Fitch was also a Revolutionary soldier, and served under Washington at Trenton and Valley Forge.

During the fall months of 1909, the Admiral Bunce Section, No. 42, Hartford, Conn., of the Navy League of the United States, moved to take special action towards the further honoring and perpetuating the memory of this distinguished inventor John Fitch, a native of Windsor (now South Windsor), this state—the first in the world's history to invent and apply steam propulsion of vessels through water—one of the world's greatest inventions. Messrs. Knapp and Welles were appointed a special committee to examine and report upon the rightful claims of Fitch *to priority of invention and application of steam propulsion of vessels through water*, and their report (D) which follows, was made December 6, 1909, to Mr. Francis B. Allen, chairman of the Admiral Bunce Section.

Since the report of this Committee was made to the chairman of the Admiral Bunce Section, the Hon. O. Vincent Coffin of Middletown, Judge John A. Stoughton of South Windsor and Mr. A. D. Risteen of Hartford, have been added to the membership of this Committee. Governor Coffin has since traversed a much wider field than was practicable for the first Committee, and by much labor and research secured authentic and valuable papers and records regarding Fitch and his invention. These researches are given in detail (F) and follow the report first made by the Committee.

FREDERIC KNAPP,

Chairman of Committee.

HARTFORD, CONN.,

December 6, 1909.

Francis B. Allen, Esq.,

Chairman, Admiral Bunce Section, Hartford, of National
Navy League, U. S.

Your Committee appointed to examine into the priority claim to the discovery, invention and application of steam power to the propulsion of vessels, beg leave to report that they have examined the records and papers on file in the Connecticut State Library, and are of the opinion that the honor of this discovery belongs of right to John Fitch, a native of Windsor, this state, who was born January 20, 1743.

The history of Fitch's marvelous invention, and of its practical application in the waters of the Delaware and Ohio rivers and elsewhere, has been narrated by William Wood of East Windsor Hill in his letter dated March 12, 1883, and published in the Hartford Times, April 19 of that year; also in a report of a special committee appointed by the general assembly convened in 1887, which report was signed by

O. VINCENT COFFIN, *Chairman of the Senate*;A. FOSTER HIGGINS, *Chairman of the House*

(by O. V. C., by request);

C. E. OSBORNE, }
LUKE E. WOOD, } *House Committee.*

This report was accepted by the Senate and House, and a tablet in bronze to the memory of John Fitch was ordered and placed on the east wall of the north entrance to the Capitol building in Hartford. This report and the accompanying monograph prepared by the late William Wood were recorded in the archives of this state, and copies of the same were sent to the secretary of state of the United States, with request from this state that they be recorded in the archives of the United States for the information of posterity.

With these papers in the archives of our own state and also in the archives of the United States, your committee at

this time need only to make special reference to two points therein—the scope of Fitch's wonderful invention, and its date. With regard to its scope: On August 29, 1785, Fitch petitioned Congress to “facilitate the inland navigation of the United States,” especially in the waters of the Mississippi, by his invention. In 1786, he claimed in a private letter to General Thomas Mifflin that his invention would answer for sea voyages as well and adds: “Should I suggest that the navigation between this (country) and Europe may be made so easy as shortly to make us the most popular empire on earth it probably at this time would make the whole very laughable.” Would that this marvelous genius could see to-day the battleships of every nation propelled by steam.

With regard to the date of his discovery:

April 15, 1785—Steam as a motive power was conceived by Fitch to be applied to carriages, and then to vessels.

August 20, 1785—Exhibited a practical model.

August 29, 1785—Fitch memorialized congress in respect to internal navigation, especially of the Mississippi.

September 27, 1785—Drawings and models of his boat submitted to the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia.

March 18, 1786—New Jersey passed a law giving Fitch for fourteen years “the sole and exclusive right of constructing, making, using and employing or navigating all and every species or kinds of boats or water craft which might be urged or impelled by the force of fire or steam in all the creeks, rivers and so forth within the territory or jurisdiction of this state.”

February 3, 1787—Delaware granted similar rights.

March 19, 1787—New York granted similar rights.

March 28, 1787—Pennsylvania granted similar rights.

November 7, 1787—Virginia granted similar rights.

July 26, 1788—Boat steamed from Philadelphia to Burlington, 20 miles—“the longest trip ever made by a steamboat at that time.”

October 12, 1788—Boat steamed from Philadelphia to Burlington carrying thirty passengers.

April 16, 1790—Fitch's success was so great that he said: "We reigned Lord High Admirals of the Delaware."

August 26, 1791—Congress granted letters patent to Fitch covering a period of fourteen years. This document was signed by General Washington and by Thomas Jefferson, General Henry Knox and John Randolph, commissioners.

1793—Fitch went to France, and left his drawings and specifications with Mr. Vail. It is now known that these drawings and specifications came soon afterward into possession of Fulton. Fitch's invention preceded Fulton's by more than twenty years. Fulton's "Clermont" was not completed until August, 1807.

July 2, 1798—This remarkable man, confident of his discoveries, but wholly without resources, broken down by misfortunes and disappointments, ended the struggle by committing suicide.

It is difficult for us at the present day to imagine the condition of things before all the world used steam power, but we may perhaps imagine in some degree the derision which must first have met John Fitch the dreamer, the man with "Wheels in his head," half crazed by chimerical idea, who believed so fully in his invention as to think he could induce solid men to put good money into such a wild venture.

Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to General Horace Porter, who, after the lapse of a century, discovered in an almost forgotten cemetery in France the body of John Paul Jones, which was afterward brought home with honors by our government in one of our own battleships under Captain Wainwright's command.

Our state should do like honor to her distinguished son who now rests in an unmarked grave in Bardstown, Kentucky. Nor will this discharge her duty toward this genius of a single idea, but a suitable monument should be erected to John Fitch's memory upon our state house grounds.

Your committee recommend, and believe it now practicable, with the aid of Windsor friends of Fitch, to secure

a sufficient plot of ground belonging to his birthplace, and to place thereon a stone and tablet commemorating his discovery and invention.

Respectfully submitted,

FREDERIC KNAPP,
MARTIN WELLES,

Committee.

GENEALOGY.

John Fitch of Windsor, Conn., the inventor of steam propulsion of vessels through water, belonged to a distinguished Connecticut family. The genealogy of his branch of the family was traced and published by John G. Fitch of Olmsted, Ohio, A. D., 1886, from which the following extracts are made:

"From one of the remaining fragments of the ancient church register of Bocking, adjoining Braintree, Essex (England), we learn that Thomas Fitch married Ann Pew, August 6, 1611. Of their children, five sons and the widowed mother emigrated to America and settled in Connecticut. The names of only three are known with certainty, viz., Thomas, James and Joseph.

"Thomas Fitch came in company with other emigrants in 1638 and settled in Norwalk. He had two sons, and was great-grandfather to Thomas Fitch, Governor of the Colony of Connecticut from 1754 to 1766.

"James Fitch (Reverend) was in his sixteenth year when he came to this country in 1638. After a long preparation for the ministry under the Revs. Hooker and Stone of Hartford he was ordained in 1646 as pastor of the church at Saybrook, Conn. In 1660 he removed with the greater proportion of his congregation to Norwich, and in 1702 retired to Lebanon, where he died November 18, 1702.

"Joseph Fitch of Norwalk, Conn. in 1652, of Hartford, Conn. in 1660, where he married Mary, daughter of Rev. Samuel Stone, removed to Windsor, Conn., where he purchased a twentieth part of the original township and was living as late as 1713. His great-grandson John (whose father and grandfather bore the name of Joseph), born in South Windsor, Conn., January 21, 1743, was the inventor of the first steamboat, of whose many misfortunes, the greatest was that he appeared in the world before it was prepared to appreciate the importance of the great discovery he had made."

* Obtained through the courtesy of Mrs. Welles Wetherell, of Manchester, Conn., and Mrs. Louise B. Parsons, New Britain, Conn.

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Historical Paper by Hon. O. Vincent Coffin, former Governor of Connecticut, and read by him before the members of the Admiral Bunce Section, Hartford, Conn., of the Navy League of the United States, and the Historical Society of Connecticut, at Hartford, January 31, 1911.

Some twenty-two years ago there came to your speaker, quite unsought, an opportunity that became a duty, to investigate the claims of John Fitch, as the first to adapt steam to the moving of boats on water, and to share in causing a simple and quite inexpensive memorial of his great work to be placed in our Capitol, as enduring evidence of the credit to which the investigation proved him to be entitled. The greatly increased honor recently given to another (Fulton) has seemed to call for earnest protest in the interests of historical accuracy, and as your speaker humbly claims, of obvious justice.

The opinion that the power of steam might be utilized for moving boats in water is claimed to have been held and mentioned at least as far back as 1543, and it has also been claimed that a successful experiment with a ship of 200 tons was made in Spain on June 17th of that year by the inventor, Garay.

The late William Wood, M.D., of South Windsor, Conn., who pursued careful investigations, for some ten years prior to 1858 respecting the claims of Fitch, states that thorough examination of records at Barcelona and of the royal archives at Simancas indicated conclusively that Garay's ship "was moved by wheels and muscular power—not by steam." The *Scientific American* of November 20, 1858, states that a London lawyer, John Macgregor, had been investigating the same subject, and in a paper read before the London Society of Arts, said: "Some months ago I inspected two letters, written in A. D. 1543 by Blasco de Garay, and now preserved in the national archives at Simancas, Spain. These give the particulars of experiments at Malaga and Barcelona with large vessels propelled by paddle-wheels turned by forty men. By many authors, and for a long time, it has been positively

affirmed that Blasco de Garay used a steam engine for marine propulsion, but after careful and minute investigation at Simancas, Madrid and Barcelona, I cannot find one particle of reliable evidence for this assertion."

Upon the publication of the "Life of John Fitch" in 1857, by Thompson Westcott, Dr. Wood is said to have found that work to give details so much more fully than he had thus far been able to give them, that he put his own manuscript away and for a time dropped his plans. But in 1883 he contributed to the *Hartford Times* an exceedingly interesting and instructive article, much of which appears to have been taken from Mr. Westcott's book. The *Times* republished Dr. Wood's paper in 1909, and we must certainly honor him for his long-continued effort to secure justice to the memory of Fitch. He settled in South Windsor for the practice of his profession in 1847, and upon hearing from the oldest inhabitants of that section some of the facts about Fitch, he applied himself diligently, whenever he could spare the time, to a prolonged and extensive investigation, with the view of securing such evidence as would establish fully and clearly the credit for one of, if not the most, important of the inventions of all time. Many statements in Dr. Wood's article are herein repeated upon the same (or in some instances upon additional) authority.

There seems to have been no early claim, other than the mythical one of Garay, to the invention of the steamboat, and certainly no other craft of the sort is claimed to have existed for nearly 200 years thereafter. In 1736 Jonathan Hulls, an Englishman, is said to have secured a patent in England for "a boat to be propelled by the aid of steam," but nothing further than the publication of a pamphlet and cut in 1737 ever resulted, so far as I have found.

During the first eighty years of the eighteenth century a number of other persons claimed to have reached a point near success; but it is not the purpose of this paper, even if time would allow, to go into the details of their various plans and efforts, and the recital of the reasons why they failed of final victory. It appears safe to say that down to A. D. 1785 no

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practical steamboat had been invented and exhibited, much less put into practical operation, either here or in Europe. Admitting the correctness of this conclusion, the field of inquiry and discussion is brought within comparatively narrow limits, and the numbers of those whose claims and merits are to be considered becomes small. But neither the narrowness of the limits nor the smallness of the numbers affords an indication of the extent and the warmth of the literature of the case.

John Fitch was born in South Windsor, Conn., January 21, 1743. His boyhood, after he reached the age of 9 years, was mainly passed in farm work, though he was allowed a few weeks at school in each of several subsequent years. His eagerness for learning was such that he managed to get a few minutes, morning and evening, for study. We cannot tarry to go over the interesting details of that early life, beyond stating that he had in full measure the burdens and discouragements incident to such aspirations and ambitions as were his, and as only a more favorable environment than his could readily gratify. He early showed an unusual taste for mathematics, learned to do surveyor's work as it was done at that time, and exhibited decided aptitude and talent for mechanical operations. When seventeen he shipped as sailor on a vessel that was to sail from Rocky Hill, made one voyage to Newport and Providence, and reached home on the return trip five weeks later. He next engaged in learning to repair watches, and on reaching 21 years of age he continued such work and also started a little brass foundry. He joined two young men in the business of manufacturing potash, subsequently leaving the potash business to his partners while he went on with his brass work. The potash business failed. The plant was established in the township of Hartland, where there were not more than thirty or forty families, whose combined output of ashes was only about 1,000 bushels a year.

He married Lucy Roberts on December 29, 1767—most unfortunately, as it proved. Two years later he left home, family and friends, and, scantily clothed and having but eight dollars in his pocket, he went away to seek the peace that

he could not have at home, and that favor of fortune which thus far had been denied him. He walked to Albany, thence to New York, and on through New Jersey, making his way fairly well by cleaning clocks for residents along the roads over which he passed. He tarried at Trenton, devoting his time to making fifty or sixty pairs of brass sleeve buttons. With these as his stock in trade, and "eight or ten shillings in his pocket," he started out selling buttons and cleaning clocks in the country. He succeeded, and this was the beginning of a season of considerable prosperity.

When the War of the Revolution broke out he considered himself worth £800—say \$4,000. He enlisted in the American Army and was at once made first lieutenant of a company raised in Trenton. William Tucker, an old resident, was appointed second lieutenant. Fitch showed his admirable spirit by proposing that they change places, he being a comparative stranger, and the change was made. His services as gunsmith were soon so greatly needed that, without his desire, he was excused from military duty, so that he might render the very important service of armorer, as requested by the Committee of Safety of the Province of New Jersey; but he still attended the drills of his company. The need of his services as gunsmith was extremely pressing and he worked Sundays, which led to his expulsion from the Methodist Church, of which he was a member.

In November, 1776, the British approached Trenton. On December 8th Washington crossed the Delaware. All active Whigs left New Jersey. Fitch fled with them, going to Bucks County, Pa. The importance of the mechanical service he was able to render, and did render, and the privileges he could but did not wish to exercise, seem to have promoted prejudice and conspiracies against him, and he finally quit the military service.

In November, 1778, he became one of the members of the Hatborough Library at Warminster, Pa., and was appointed a member of the committee to look after some of the regulations of the institution. At Warminster, whither he had fled, he started business in a small way, but the British

advance drove him away again. He returned to his home after the battles of Trenton and Princeton, and found that his tools and some of his furniture had been practically destroyed. He returned to Bucks County and began business again as silversmith, but in time the approach of the enemy again forced his flight. He had some gold and silver on hand and these he buried at night—safely as he thought. When he looked for them afterward, he found they had been dug up and carried away.

Business becoming dull, and such necessities as sutlers supplied to the troops at Valley Forge being very scantily met, he embarked in the enterprise of supplying tobacco and beer. He prospered nominally, making \$250 to \$750 per week in Continental currency—of which he had \$40,000 on hand when its value had declined from 40 to 1, when the British evacuated Philadelphia and the American troops left Valley Forge. Again he started business in Bucks County, in working old brass and silver. He did not succeed this time, and meanwhile saw the value of his \$40,000 shrink from \$1,000 to \$400. He invested his all in Virginia land warrants, and decided to go to Kentucky (which then belonged to Virginia), to make the most favorable location of his claims. First, however, he sought a commission as deputy surveyor. Dr. John Ewing, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, gave him a letter stating that "John Fitch was a worthy man and had the proper qualifications to become a deputy surveyor." Other prominent men added their commendation, and he was appointed early in 1780. Then, with a companion who was to assist in surveying, he made his way, with great difficulty, to what is now Wheeling Island in the Ohio River.

Here they found eleven boats preparing to sail down the river, and joined the party as passengers. The early part of the trip was very pleasant, the record stating that "it was a bright morning when the voyagers left Wheeling and the sun shone serenely upon the thick vegetation on the banks of the river, which were gay with the garniture of spring. They floated along amid scenes of wild beauty, drinking delight from the ever varying natural panorama which opened upon

them at each bend of the river, relieving to the eye the majestic terraces of hills which stretched away on either side into the blue distance." The next day they early encountered hostile Indians who appeared upon the river banks. The exciting adventure lasted through that day, but not one of the boating party was killed. How it was with the Indians was not learned.

Fitch reached Kentucky, made his surveys, and located his land-warrants. Rev. Mr. Barnard, who was a "good woodsman, intelligent, and very poor," assisted. Fitch had been authorized to locate for others, and was to have a "half interest" for the service. He offered Mr. Barnard a half interest in his share—he (Barnard) to look up the best locations, and Fitch to survey the tracts chosen. Fitch was engaged in this work through the year 1780.

In the spring of 1781 Fitch returned to Virginia leaving Barnard in Kentucky, and had his surveys recorded. He expected to meet Barnard the next spring, but never saw him again, though he heard nine years later that Barnard had done exceedingly well and was worth £50,000. Fitch's lands amounted to 1,600 acres. He returned to Bucks County and settled up his business. This gave him about £150 in specie. He believed he could make a fortune by proper operations in Kentucky land. His preliminary plan, as now made, was to buy flour at Fort Pitt, go down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans, and return to Philadelphia before the end of the surveying season. Meanwhile, "Barnard was exploring and examining lands in Kentucky for their joint benefit." Fitch reached Fort Pitt in March, 1782, and bought the flour. A large boat was chartered by Fitch and three others, though Fitch "had the greatest portion of the cargo." There were ten persons in all on the boat. They left Pittsburgh March 18, 1782, and at Wheeling Island were joined by three other boats. On the morning of March 21st the boat ran aground near the mouth of the Muskingum River. Here they encountered hostile Indians again, but Fitch was far less fortunate than on the former occasion. Two of his party were shot and subsequently scalped, and the others were

made prisoners. The principal brave of three was known as Captain Buffaloe. To Buffaloe were assigned six prisoners, including Fitch, and two went to each of the others. The white men were then taken on a long tramp, through the unsettled region which is now one of the best portions of Ohio, to near the mouth of the Maumee River, and thence by water over Lake Erie and on to Detroit, where there was a British military post or fort, at which a good price was ready for such prisoners taken there.

By cutting with his graver many little figures on the powder horns of the Indians, and making interesting articles for women and toys for children, Fitch won great favor with the savages, and was well treated. Fitch and his companions were delivered to Major Duposters, who asked them for the news from the East, but did not credit their story of the capture of Cornwallis, which had occurred some few months earlier. A fortnight or so later the prisoners were started on Lake Erie for Fort Erie at the entrance to the Niagara River, where they arrived in two weeks. After painful experiences on the way over Lake Ontario to Fort Oswegatchie they, with other prisoners, were taken to an island called Prison Island, opposite Coteau de Lac, arriving May 25, 1782. This was the place of detention of prisoners taken by the British in the north and west.

There is a very interesting account of the wonderful way in which, out of very crude materials, Fitch got up tools for making brass buttons. The buttons were readily sold. Then he made wooden clocks, and showed his ingenuity in other directions. After five months at Prison Island Fitch and many others were taken to Quebec, and thence, a month later, they were sent for exchange to New York, where they arrived after a voyage of ten weeks, and were released.

Fitch made his way to Warminster, in Bucks County, Pa. Early in 1783 a few men formed a company to send Fitch to locate and survey lands under land warrants soon to be obtained. Col. Anderson (one of these men) and several of his friends accompanied Fitch until 36,000 acres had been selected and surveyed, but the Colonel and his friends were

burdensome rather than helpful, and Fitch was so fortunate as to have them go home. He hired some frontiersmen and in two weeks added 48,000 acres to the land selected and surveyed. The next spring the shareholders, being pleased with Fitch's work, prevailed upon him to resume it. So in March, 1784, with a dozen assistants, he made his way to and down the Ohio River, and thence up the Muskingum 85 miles. Signs of Indians led him to turn back. Returning to the Ohio he surveyed lands bordering it for 47 miles, when fresh signs of Indians appeared. Succeeding in avoiding the Indians, Fitch made further surveys, and returned to Bucks County much pleased with his prospects of a fortune. On this trip he had surveyed 250,000 acres. He soon made another trip to re-survey some of the lands he had covered, and to designate more particularly the best portions of the mile-square sections into which Congress had, unfortunately for him and his friends, decided to divide all public lands in the states set up in the Northwestern Territory. Returning again, Fitch petitioned Congress for an appointment as surveyor in the western country. He was strongly recommended for this position by four prominent men, thus: "These are to certify that we have been acquainted with Mr. John Fitch for some time past, and that he is a sober and industrious man, and is worthy of confidence for his honesty and integrity; that he understands the business of surveying, and having traveled through a great part of the Indian country, he appears well acquainted with it. Should Congress therefore give him a deputation as surveyor of a district in one of the new states, we believe that he would do honor to the appointment by his knowledge, industry, and fidelity in the discharge of his duty. Given under our hands this 29 December 1784, at Philadelphia.

"JOHN EWING,
 "WM. HUTCHINS,
 "CADWALADER MORRIS,
 "JONA. D. SERGEANT."

While awaiting the result of his petition he made a drawing of the Northwestern country from Hutchins' and Mor-

row's maps, with additions from his own knowledge. He got a sheet of copper, and hammered, polished and engraved it, and then made a press and printed from it. The first copies were printed on a cider press. A writer says: "The general positions of the great rivers and lakes are given with surprising accuracy." Being unwilling to push his own case he failed to secure the desired appointment. But this was not a misfortune, for while he waited he was pondering the idea of an invention which had been partly formed in his mind during his tarry at home. In April, 1785, it occurred to him that there might be some power employed to move carriages along the roads without the aid of horses, and he began to plan a steam carriage. But in about a week, as he tells us, he "gave it over as impracticable, and turned his thoughts to vessels." There is good testimony to the fact that he showed, in the May or June following, a drawing of a steamboat. He took his drawings to his friend, Rev. Mr. Irwin, who showed him, in a copy of Martin's "Philosophy," a description of a steam engine. Fitch was greatly astonished and said: "Although it was not to my credit, I did not know that there was a steam engine on earth when I proposed to gain a force by steam."

Mr. Charles Whittlesey of Cincinnati is mentioned as having done much to awaken attention to the claims of Fitch, having published a pamphlet in 1845, entitled "Justice to the Memory of John Fitch." He also wrote the sketch of Fitch published in 1851 in Sparks' "American Biography." He states that Fitch found paddle wheels to labor too much in the water, and that this led him to adopt oars or straight paddles.

While working out his early experiments for a steamboat, Fitch advertised copies of his map for sale "at the very small price of a French crown," and is said to have realized some \$800 from the resulting sales. When "every thought encouraged him," and he had expended more time upon the details of his invention, Fitch determined to seek the assistance of Congress. With this purpose in view he consulted

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Dr. Ewing, then Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, who gave him a letter to William C. Houston, an ex-member of Congress, a copy of which follows:

"Philad., 20 August 1785.

"DEAR SIR:—I have examined Mr. Fitch's machine for rowing a Boat, by the alternate operation of steam and the atmosphere, and am of opinion that his principles are proper, and Philosophical, and have no doubt of the success of the scheme if executed by a skillful workman. It is certain that the extensive force of Water, when converted into steam, is equal to any obstruction that can be laid in its way, so as to burst any metalick vessel in which we would endeavour to confine it, and the application of this force to turn a wheel in the water, so as to answer the purpose of Oars, seems easy and natural by the machine which he proposes, and of which he has shown me a rough model. Should such a machine be brought into common use in the inland navigation through the United States, it would be exceedingly advantageous in transporting the productions of America to Market, and thereby greatly increase the value of our back Lands. He proposes to lay his invention before Congress, and I hope he will meet with the encouragement which his mechanical genius deserves. The project deserves a trial to be made of it, to see how far the execution will answer the theory; and countenance of Congress in these productions of Genius, will encourage others and thereby give birth to discoveries that may be infinitely Beneficial. As you are a Gentleman of Knowledge in these matters I make no doubt of his receiving your patronage so far at least as to give him an opportunity of laying his scheme before Congress.

" I am, sir,

"Etc., Etc.,

"JOHN EWING."

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"To William C. Houston, Esq."

Upon receipt of this letter and an examination of Fitch's model, Mr. Houston gave Fitch a letter to a serving member of Congress as follows:

"Trenton, 25 August, 1785.

"SIR:—I have examined the Principles and construction of Mr. Fitch's steamboat, and though not troubled with a Penchant for Projects, cannot help approving the simplicity of the plan. The greatest objections to most pretensions of this sort, is the delicacy and complication of the machinery. This does not seem liable to such objections; as to the moving force of the whole, we know very well that the power of steam is beyond conception, it is everything but omnipotent, and almost that.

"The model is plain, and you will at once form a judgment of its probable general effect. The difference produced by standing or running water is to be more attentively considered. I enclose you Dr. Ewing's letter. He is certainly an able judge in these cases, and I cannot help expressing a wish that it may be practicable to do something toward procuring an experiment. The person who offers it, you know. He is a man highly deserving, as modest, ingenious, enterprising, and of good morals.

" I am, sir,

"Etc., Etc.,

"WILLM. C. HOUSTON."

"Honorable L. Cadwalader, Esqre."

Congress was then in session in New York, and while upon his way thither Fitch stopped at Princeton, showed his plans to Dr. Samuel Smith, Provost of the College, who gave him a letter to Mr. Read, a member of Congress from North Carolina. This letter was as follows:

"Princeton, Aug. 27, 1785.

"SIR:—The bearer, Mr. John Fitch, has shown me a model of an instrument to row a boat against streams, which appears to me to be constructed on just and Philosophical principles. As he desires to propose it to Congress in order to obtain their encouragement and assistance to construct a Boat on the same principles, he has requested to be introduced to some gentlemen of distinction in the honorable Body, supposing it may be of use to forward his intentions. After convincing them of its practicability and utility, if he should obtain adequate assistance for that purpose, he makes no doubt that Congress will so recommend him to the Legislators of particular States, that are likely to derive the most benefit from it, so that he shall not want a proper compensation. You will best judge about this. But I am assured that if it be consistent with their duty, a scheme that is the effect of ingenuity and application, and promises to be of public service, will not want a proper patron in you.

"I am, sir,

"Etc., Etc.,

"SAML. SMITH."

"Honorable Mr. Read."

Fitch sent these letters to the President of Congress, with a letter, of which a copy follows:

"August 29, 1785.

"SIR:—The subscriber begs leave to lay at the feet of Congress an attempt he has made to facilitate the internal Navigation of the United States, adapted especially to the Waters of the Mississippi. The machine he has invented for the purpose, has been examined by several Gentlemen of Learning and Ingenuity, who have given it their approbation. Being thus encouraged, he is desirous

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to solicit the attention of Congress to a rough model of it now with him, that after examination into the principles upon which it operates, they may be enabled to judge whether it deserves encouragement. And he, as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

“JOHN FITCH.”

“His Excellency, the President of Congress.”

Much to the disappointment of Fitch the committee to which the matter was referred made no report. He then applied to the Spanish Minister in New York, who showed much interest and gave encouragement, but desired the invention for the sole advantage of his King. To this Fitch would not agree, as he wished that the invention should be for the advantage of mankind. Mr. Westcott says that acceptance of the terms might have made him rich. He subsequently regretted his refusal.

Meanwhile Congress had taken action with reference to public lands that destroyed the hopes Fitch and his friends had entertained of large gains through his years of severe work in that connection. However, he “lent every thought” to his steamboat project, and on September 27, 1785, he presented a drawing of his boat, and models, to the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia. He indicated in this instance an endless chain with floats and paddle-boards passing along the sides of the boat. The records of the Society show this entry:

“Tuesday, Sept. 27, 1785.

“The model with a Drawing and Description of a Machine for working a Boat against the stream by means of a steam engine was laid before the Society by Mr. John Fitch.”

Fitch now consulted Benjamin Franklin, who “spoke very flatteringly of the scheme” but would not write anything about it. Fitch concluded that Dr. Franklin desired to gain honor to himself, as some two months later he “laid down

somewhat of a different plan." Franklin's plans were in one case taking in water at the bow and forcing it out at the stern; the other was called an "air boat to go by forcing out air against water." No plan to use steam is indicated in Franklin's drawings, but an editorial written and published by his grandson in 1791 states that he did purpose using steam in the water-working plan, though I have found no other evidence of the correctness of this statement. Franklin was one of the leading patrons of James Rumsey, to whom President Washington was personally friendly. Rumsey's plan was similar to Franklin's, and both were substantially the same as Bernouilli's (of 1753), but as the plan was a failure in all cases we need not tarry to consider it in detail. Washington alluded to Rumsey's proposed craft as a "mechanical boat" and there is strong testimony that the muscular power of men was employed by Rumsey to operate his machinery and move his boat, though it is said that he gained some aid toward moving it upstream by the action of the stream through water wheels upon a system of setting poles.

There was a bitter controversy between Fitch and his friends on one side, and Rumsey and his friends on the other. Rumsey claimed, after the exhibition of Fitch's boat, that his plans covered the use of steam in the previous year (1784); but I have not found any other testimony of definite value to the same effect. Indeed, there is strong ground for the claim of Fitch that Rumsey fraudulently dated back his claim after he saw that Fitch's plans were succeeding. We should bear in mind that Fitch's dominant idea and corresponding claim was the application of steam, *upon any plan*, to the propulsion of boats. At a hearing given by a committee of the legislature of Virginia on November 25, 1785, Gen. Wood and Col. Wills of the Senate testified that they had seen Rumsey's boat in motion at Bath in 1784; that it was entirely different from Fitch's boat, and that it was not moved by steam. Neither General Washington, who was personally friendly to Rumsey, nor Governor Johnson of Maryland, in their letters, gave any indication that Rumsey made use of

steam. Edward Pennington and others who had seen Rumsey's boat in operation, certified, in 1785, that they had seen Rumsey's boat in operation, and "that it was propelled by water wheels and setting poles, and that no steam was used." It ought to be said, perhaps, that there appear to be persons, even now, who favor Rumsey's claim to priority, because some writer published a letter, in view of the recent Hudson-Fulton celebration, asserting Rumsey's right to the credit to be superior to that of any and all others.

In view of the very high standing of Dr. Franklin, Fitch decided, some time in 1786, to try his and Rumsey's water working plan, and ordered a boat built for the purpose; but he soon discontinued the preparations, having been convinced that the scheme could not succeed.

In March, 1786, Fitch applied to the legislatures of Pennsylvania and New Jersey for special laws to protect his interests as the inventor of the steamboat. New Jersey acted promptly, and on the 18th of that month the legislature passed a law which secured to John Fitch, for fourteen years—"The sole and exclusive right of constructing, making, using, and employing or navigating, all and every species or kinds of boats or water craft, in all the creeks, rivers, etc., within the territory or jurisdiction of this State." Action to the same effect was taken by the states of Delaware, February 3, 1787; New York, March 19, 1787; Pennsylvania, March 28, 1787; Virginia, November 7, 1787.

There was active opposition to Fitch's applications by other claimants, and even political influences were used by his competitors, he being known as an anti-Federalist, but he was justly awarded the very important victory. Neither Fulton nor any of his powerful friends appear to have taken action or interest in Fulton's behalf in any of these cases—a significant fact, in view of the recently urged claims that Fulton was giving special attention in 1784 to the problem of steam navigation.

Fitch continued to improve his plans, and on October 12, 1788, a boat built by him, moved by steam power only, and carrying thirty passengers, made the trip from Philadel-

phia to Burlington, on the Delaware River, against the current, a distance of twenty miles, in 3 hours and 10 minutes, or at the rate of about $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles per hour. Fitch built a larger boat which made 8 miles per hour, in April, 1790, and again carried as passengers many prominent men, who were so greatly pleased that they presented the owner of the boat with a suit of fine flags. This boat ran through the summer of 1790 between Philadelphia and Burlington, making regular trips and carrying passengers, its dates of sailing being regularly advertised in the newspapers.

Under the new National constitution the authority to grant exclusive rights under patents was transferred from the states to the general government, and on April 23, 1791, Fitch asked for a patent on his invention of the steamboat, and the Federal Congress took action, the record of which is as follows:

"August 26, 1791.

"Whereupon ordered that letters patent be granted to the said John Fitch for his aforesaid inventions for the term of fourteen years." The document as issued was signed by President Washington, and by Commissioners Thomas Jefferson, Henry Knox, and John Randolph.

Fitch was not content with his successful passenger boat, but began one named the *Perseverance*, large enough to carry freight also. He expected to finish it in time to save the benefit of the Virginia law of November 7, 1787, which secured his rights for fourteen years, but which became void at the expiration of three years "unless the said John Fitch shall then have in use, on some river of this commonwealth, boats or craft of at least twenty tons burden, navigated by steam." The great value of the Virginia law was, that it gave Fitch the exclusive right of navigating the Ohio River and its tributaries with the steamboat. In this he was disappointed. The boat and machinery were nearly completed, when a violent storm arose, causing it to break from its moorings, and it was blown upon Petty's Island, in the

Delaware, opposite the upper part of Philadelphia. The tide being unusually high, the boat was driven so far upon the land that it was impossible to get it off in season to avail himself of the benefits of the Virginia law. The stockholders became discouraged and refused to furnish any more funds, and Fitch having exhausted all his resources, the boat was abandoned.

Mrs. Alice Carey Sutcliffe, great granddaughter of Fulton, in a recent magazine article says: "Fitch drew water in through the bow and forced it out through the stern. His boat, the prototype of Rumsey's, was ridiculed. His shareholders withdrew, one by one, from the company." This statement, as has already been indicated, is untrue, for Fitch never used that method of propulsion, and, as indicated above, his shareholders withdrew for quite different reasons.

In 1793, Fitch went to France at the solicitation of our Consul at L'Orient, Aaron Vail, who had been a stockholder in Fitch's company to build a steamboat. Arriving there at the time of the threatened Revolutionary troubles, he could not obtain any pecuniary assistance. Depositing his papers and specifications in the hands of Mr. Vail he went to England, remaining in London for a time with his friend, Mr. Leslie, formerly of Philadelphia. In 1794 he returned to the United States, working his passage as a common sailor. In 1796 Fitch, backed as to cost by Livingston (it is stated), made a steamboat of a ship's yawl. This was moved by a screw propeller, upon a pond of fresh water in the city of New York, and is, as claimed and as far as I have found, the first instance of the use of a screw propeller.

He decided upon paddle wheels for his boat, and made a model from his drawings. Mr. Longstreth, of Bardstown, Ky., says that "Fitch made his model steamboat with paddle wheels as now used, and that the model was tried on a small stream in Joseph Longstreth's meadow and it realized every expectation. The machinery was made of brass with the exception of the paddle wheels, which were made of wood." This must have been in 1796 or 1797, as I make it, after his final failure and discouragement about raising capital, and only one or two years before his death.

Utterly discouraged, broken in spirit and destitute of means, Fitch probably committed suicide at Bardstown, Ky. John C. Merriam, editor and proprietor of the *American Engineer*, wrote of him in 1866 as follows: "In 1787, John Fitch, of Connecticut, built, in Philadelphia, the first condensing engine, and this without the aid of Watt's experiments—for it was only in the year 1786 that the latter patented, and made public, his most important improvements; and we have every reason to believe that Fitch was at first ignorant of them. With the assistance of common blacksmiths, he constructed a low-pressure engine, and more than this, applied the motor to a steamboat."

There is an abundance of other testimony of the best character to the same effect. Robert Fulton's claims to the invention of the steamboat have become practically the only ones still extensively urged. Born in 1765, Fulton inclined early to become an artist. In 1786 he went abroad to study, and was for some years a member of the family of the famous artist, Benjamin West. During his residence abroad he visited Aaron Vail and borrowed from him the steamboat plans, drawings, and specifications left by Fitch with Mr. Vail, and kept them for several months. He also saw Symington's boat in England, and took drawings of its machinery. When Chancellor Livingston became our Minister to France he found Fulton in Paris. Livingston had become much interested through hearing of Fitch's boats, and otherwise, in the subject of steam navigation. He visited the workshop of Boulton & Watt in England, where that firm was building improved engines and boilers, intended, up to that time, for use on land only. Something of what followed is indicated on good authority in a book entitled "Reminiscences of Saratoga and Ballston," by William L. Stone, published in 1875 and republished in 1880. I quote from pages 235-8:

"At this point a gentleman present (since Rt. Rev. Bishop Alonzo Potter of Pennsylvania, a young Episcopal divine, who is married to a daughter of the late Robert R. Livingston) joined in the conversation. 'I am not surprised, General, at your remarks,' said he, 'my own observation leading me

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to believe that many descend into History as successful claimants for public honors, who, if the facts were known, would stand in a very different light. Probably no person has received so much praise, and deserved so little, as Robert Fulton. A man of no practical ingenuity, of no power of conceiving,—much less of executing,—an original mechanical idea, his friend Golden has succeeded in persuading the public that to him is due the successful navigation of our rivers by steam. The facts, however, as I gathered them from my father-in-law, and which I believe to be substantially correct, are as follows: For thirteen years before the first steamboat was placed upon the Collect (pond) in New York, John Fitch had run a little steamer on the Delaware with great success. During that period he had experimented with various kinds of propelling power,—the screw, the side-wheel, and sweeps or long oars.

“Mr. Livingston, who was greatly interested in the success of Fitch's experiments, wished to introduce Boulton & Watt's boiler into the United States, but under the law he could not ship it unless he personally went with it. At this crisis he thought of Robert Fulton, who, originally an artist in Philadelphia, was then exhibiting a panorama in Paris. His panorama, however, failing to pay, was attached, and he himself arrested for debt and thrown into prison. Livingston, falling into the error so common to many, of believing that because an artist can draw cleverly he must necessarily succeed equally well in mechanical conception and execution, paid off Fulton's debts, and send him over to New York with one of Watt's boilers. Fulton, however, failed to rise to the occasion; and when Livingston returned, a year after, he found his pet project precisely where he had left it several years before. He therefore at once took hold of it himself, and by his energy and perseverance finally brought his idea to a successful issue,—Fulton, whom he could not entirely shake off, acting as a kind of general superintendent.’ The statements, moreover, are confirmed, not only by the late President William A. Duer of Columbia College, but by Mr. Ransom Cook, now (1875) living at Saratoga Springs,

N. Y. Mr. Cook informs me that in the summer of 1837 he was engaged upon his electro-magnetic machinery. Among his workmen were two who had been employed by Livingston and Fulton, while these gentlemen were perfecting their steamboat. They surprised him greatly by stating that Fulton was a capital draftsman and that was all. They added that he was so deficient in a knowledge of the laws of mechanics as to furnish daily mirth for the workmen; and that it was a long time before Livingston could convince him that the 'starting bar' of an engine should be made larger at the fulcrum end than at the handle."

Livingston assisted Fulton, in 1801, in building a steamboat to navigate the Seine. When all was ready, many spectators being present, the boat was pushed off, immediately broke in two, and all went to the bottom of the river. The boat and engine were recovered and another boat was built which, at its best, moved at the rate of about three miles an hour. The writer states that "if the inventions of others which Fulton has copied were removed from his boat, nothing would be left but the hull." It is stated that reference to "Charnock's History of Marine Architecture," and to Fulton's detailed statement of the points of his invention, shows that the latter were cribbed from this work and stated as his own.

As between Fitch and Fulton it is a fully established fact that credit is claimed for Fulton as the inventor of the steamboat, when his first successful steamboat, the *Clermont*, in 1807, made the trip from New York to Albany and return at the rate of somewhat less than five miles an hour, whereas Fitch's steamboat ran between two thousand and three thousand miles on the Delaware River during the summer of 1790, seventeen years earlier, and at the rate of from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 miles an hour.

In 1811 Fulton prepared a form of affidavit which he wished his close friend, Joel Barlow, to execute, in which the latter was to certify that Fulton said to him that "he found so much power was lost in taking the purchase on the water that he was of the opinion that 5 or $5\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 miles an hour in still water was as much as a boat could be propelled

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by any steam engine now known." Yet, as we have seen, Fitch's boat with his home-made engine covered 7 to 8 miles an hour, many times, more than twenty-one years earlier.

In the course of an article in the *Outlook* for October 16, 1909, Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie states that: "A small group of European experimenters had made some progress before the *Clermont* went to Albany, and in this country James Rumsey had run a primitive boat on the Delaware, and John Fitch had kept a screw steamer afloat on a pond in New Jersey."(!)

In the New York *Sunday Tribune* of May, 15, 1910, in an article signed "Navalis," this sentence appears: "Steam as a means of propulsion on water was first actually applied by Robert Fulton, early in the last century."(!)

In a book entitled "Our First Century," published in 1876, R. M. Devens, a member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and author of several works of importance, says: "Fulton's boat, which began to navigate the Hudson in 1807, was certainly the first practical demonstration of this application of steam." (!) (Pages 212-13.)

J. A. Ewins, Bachelor of Science, Professor of Engineering in University College, Dundee, in an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 22, page 478, states: "The first practical steamboat was the tug *Charlotte Dundas*, built by William Symington and tried in the Firth of Forth and Clyde Canal, in 1802."(!) He adds, in substance, that Robert Fulton followed up Symington's success, and in 1807 brought out the *Clermont*. In 1793 Fulton was "actively engaged about navigation," and "had conceived the idea of propelling vessels by steam." Nothing further until 1806—say thirteen years later: Again: "In 1798, after the death of Fitch, Livingston secured an act of the New York Assembly, vesting in him full exclusive privileges, upon condition that he should within a twelvemonth build such a boat, the mean of whose progress should not be less than four miles an hour." He does not mention the fact that Livingston obtained several extensions of time, to 1806.

In the diary of Rev. Ezra Stiles of New Haven, Conn., subsequently well known as President of Yale College, under date of August 27, 1787, this entry appears: "Judge Ellsworth, a member of the Federal Convention, just returned from Philadelphia, visited me, and tells me the Convention will not rise under three weeks. He there saw a steam engine for rowing boats against the stream, invented by Mr. Fitch of Windsor, in Connecticut. He was on board the boat and saw the experiment succeed." Later in the same year David Rittenhouse, the celebrated astronomer, Andrew Ellicott, Professor in the Episcopal Academy, and Dr. John Ewing, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, gave exceedingly strong certificates, as to having personally witnessed and greatly appreciated the successful operation of Fitch's steam-boat.

Fulton finally dropped all but one of his claims, and centered all his energy upon the point of using paddle-wheels—one over each side of the boat. Of his claims in his patents, in 1809-11, Dr. Renwick, his biographer (Sparks, Vol. 10, page 73), says: "Discarding all complexity, he had limited himself to the simple means of adapting paddle-wheels to the axle of the crank of Watt's engine." His details, in one application, were elaborate and extensive, but, as it clearly proved, they were not, as he distinctly claimed, the "most important of his discoveries," but were copied from the "History of Marine Architecture" by Charnock, published in 1803, and were not credited thereto. William Thornton, first Commissioner of Patents, who served many years, writes: "I have examined Mr. Fulton's specifications, which consist of about four pages, on which his patent was issued. The explanatory reference to his drawings and plates consists of about eighteen pages, and I am of the opinion that he must have copied about fifteen pages of the eighteen out of Charnock or some other work," and goes on to give his reasons for the opinion.

Duer states that Fulton, in his application for a patent, February 11, 1809, quotes in substance, and with substantial exactness, Charnock's definitions and tables (without credit), and goes on thus: "It is a knowledge of these proportions

and velocities which is the most important part of my discovery on the improvements of steamboats."

Side wheels had been tried by many before Fulton's time, and the fact that he was unable to make more than 5 miles an hour with the *Clermont*, while Fitch had made 8 miles an hour many years earlier with broad stern paddles, indicates the superiority of Fitch's invention at that time, over the plan Fulton wrongfully claimed as his own.

It appears altogether probable that the first really successful use of paddle wheels for steamboats was by Samuel Morey, a native of Connecticut, who early became a resident of Orford, N. H. The history of Morey's operations is exceedingly interesting, but like many other facts of interest, it cannot be included in this paper for lack of space. The fact that Livingston offered him \$7,000 for his patents is exceedingly significant, however.

Mrs. Sutcliffe quotes the late Dr. Thurston of Cornell University as saying: "Fitch evidently made the first successful experiment in the propelling of boats by steam, but William Henry has probably the honor of originating the idea and building the first steamboat ever built in the United States." Mrs. Sutcliffe thus appears to admit priority over Fulton, as to the invention of the steamboat, though her magazine articles are headlined, "Fulton's Invention of the Steamboat," and "Fulton's Invention of the *Clermont*."

A very intelligent writer in the course of an article in *Van Norden's Magazine*, says: "Who Invented the Steamboat? Fitch, with his passenger-carrying boat, stands easily first in all the world in producing a boat that could be placed in commercial service." The *Literary Digest* quotes the *Louisville Courier-Journal* as follows about Fitch: "That his steamboat of 1790 made a speed of 8 miles an hour, and was in service for several months on the Delaware River, is well established," and at the close of the article quotes: "But there seems to be no doubt that Fitch constructed the first practical steamboat ever known in the United States."

Now Fitch visited Henry in October, 1785. Henry told him that he had thought of steam as early as 1776, and had

held some conversation with Andrew Ellicott upon the subject, and that Thomas Paine had suggested it to him in 1778, but that he never did anything in the matter further than drawing some plans, and inventing a pattern of a steam wheel, which he showed Mr. Fitch, and said that as the latter had first published the plan to the world by using steam to propel boats, he would not lay claim to the invention. Henry promised that he would make a model of his suggested steam wheel, as Mr. Fitch did not exactly understand from the drawing how it would work. This promise was not fulfilled, and Henry died a year or so later.

In Sparks' *American Biography*, Vol. 6, new series, in the preface to a long and carefully prepared article entirely favorable to Fitch, the writer, Charles Whittlesey, says: "If there are statements and conclusions at variance with long settled opinions, they result from the facts themselves, which justice requires should be boldly spoken."

Jonathan Hull's invention, in 1736, appears to have shown a method of obtaining a rotary motion for paddle-wheels, but he built no boat. Symington, in 1801, had paddle-wheels and a covered wheel house, and a steering wheel in the bow of the boat.

Dr. Renwick, in the article "Robert Fulton" in Sparks' *American Biography*, Vol. 10, page 71, says: "The most formidable opposition to the privileges of Fulton was founded upon the discoveries of Fitch." Again, on p. 74: "Grants made to Fitch by the state of New Jersey were resorted to." Again, p. 88: "It is very probable indeed that had it not been for the experiments of Fitch, Fulton might never have applied his attention to steam navigation."

The editor of the *American Engineer* (J. C. Merriam) and of *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* wrote strongly in favor of Fitch in 1866 ("Eighty years of Progress in the U. S.", p. 234 and on).

Daniel French, a native of Berlin, Conn., who was so "full of notions about the steam engine" that he was considered by friends as a little "off" in his head, moved to Brownsville, Pa., somewhere about 1800, and established

himself in the business of building steam engines and steamboats. He so improved steam engines that he was granted two patents on October 12, 1809.

Livingston and Fulton established a branch at Pittsburg to build steamboats for navigating the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and it appears quite possible that they employed French or some other person to build their first boats, on their own steamboat plans. But these boats were probably not successful. One of their boats was called the *Enterprise*, and something appears of the service of this boat in an account of Livingston and Fulton's project. Somewhere I have seen the statement that one of their early boats was named the *Enterprise*. I have a letter from French to his mother, written May 22, 1816, at Brownsville, Pa., which seems important in this connection. I have deposited the original with the Middlesex County Historical Society. It was given to me in 1887 by the late Deacon Selah Goodrich, who died in March, 1888, at the age of nearly 94.

In the course of a long letter about various matters he writes: "I will inform you that in this Country I am gitting my living by those means for which I had like to have a master put over me for attempting to wit Building Steam Boats. I have built two that are now running in the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi. I have also put in operation a large Cotten Manufactory moved by a Steam Engine. Have began a large Steam Saw Mill and have more Steam Boats to build also Grist or Flour Mills all to be put in motion by Steam. I have with Daniels help made the greatest improvements on the Steam Engine that have been made for a Century past the benefits of which will be of incalculable benefit to this western Country. The steamboat I first built in this place called the *Enterprise* performed her passage from New Orleans to this place in thirty-five days against the courants of the Mississippi, Ohio and Monogahelia Rivers, a distance of more than two thousand two hundred miles and was the first that ever assended those waters and the success of this Boat has raised the value of the Country bordering on those waters fifty per cent. since I built the first I have built an other

which moves with more speed, she arrived from New Orleans at Cincinnati where I was a few days past 700 miles below this place by water and 1500 from Orleans in 24 days and the Boats that I have built are the only ones that have yet traversed the waters of the Ohio upward to any distance. The steam Boat I first built was of great service in carrying on the war against the British at Orleans. She was loaded with warlike stores and ammunition at Pittsburg and after she arrived at Orleans was employed by General Jackson in the service of the government in prosecuting the war in which she was of essential service transporting cannon small arms ammunition officers soldiers baggage etc. She went one voyage to the Gulf of Mexico with British prisoners. Made one trip 300 miles up to the Red River towards north Mexico with 250 soldiers and baggage and returned to Orleans in 7 days from the time she left it as her captain reports made many trips from Orleans to Natchez and back. Thus you see that although I was thought to be full of idle Dreams from a Bewildered Brain and airy fancy bordering on delirium, the shadows have led to the solid substance; what would our old pious Deacon Sage say of all those things now; would he now wish to put a Master over me think you?"

In closing (for I must stop somewhere, although I leave a large number of interesting items untouched), I quote briefly from a recent editorial in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*:

"The case of John Fitch is a sad one. He was the pioneer, and was successful. He ran his boat on the Delaware river for months, but he was received with derision at first. There was then no man in this city—probably not in the whole country—with the prophetic vision of Chancellor Livingston at a later day, who possessed the wealth and influence to impress the fact of Fitch's success on the public. It argues ill for the state of enlightenment at that time that there was no one who could foresee the possibilities of steam navigation. If some Philadelphian had arisen at that moment to do what Livingston did subsequently in New York, much of our history might have been changed. We would have had steam-

boats on the Western waters nearly twenty years earlier than we did.

"It is idle to speculate on what might have been, but it is certain that this city owes something to the memory of Fitch, the prophet whom it rejected. The least that can be done is to rear a monument to his memory, and to place a headstone over his grave. In the library of the Historical Society to-day reposes the combined diary and autobiography of this man. It is one of the most pathetic of human documents. It shows the mighty soul of a man struggling against the stupidity and conservatism of his age. We think the Historical Society should take the initiative in the matter, and we believe that a reasonable sum can be secured for a suitable memorial to the man who was born out of due season,—who deserved so much and got the worst."

And I would not omit quoting the admirable little address of Mrs. Carrie Crosby Fulton, Regent of the John Fitch Chapter, D. A. R., of Bardstown, Ky., at the dedication or setting up of the marker at Fitch's grave. Learning through Mrs. Dr. L. M. Rowe, of Indianapolis, of a notice in a Bardstown paper to the effect that the United States had furnished a stone and that a Mrs. Fulton had addressed those who gathered to witness its erection, I wrote that lady on December 17, 1909, requesting a copy of her address. She responded as follows:

"Bardstown, Kentucky,

January 4, 1910.

DEAR SIR:—The rush of Christmas preparation, and an ill-timed attack of 'grip,' have prevented my replying to your note of December 17th with the promptness it merited; but I am sure that explanation carries with it a sufficient apology.

"And now in sending the requested address—if my modest effort deserves so high-sounding an appellation,—I am moved to the utterance of some further explanatory words.

"The John Fitch Chapter, D. A. R., of this place, which has addressed itself to the work of erecting a monument to the memory of this neglected genius, is only some two years old; and it found itself, at the beginning of its labor, confronted by the task of cleaning up and restoring, as far as possible, to a state of order and repair, the badly neglected burial-square where John Fitch's grave could only be located by means of ancient documents preserved at our court house. We have succeeded in grading, sodding, re-building graves and tombstones, and then put up, at Fitch's grave, the simple marker given by the government to the resting place of each Revolutionary soldier. [This is 26 inches high by 12 broad.] And it was on the occasion of this marking that I delivered the little address asked for. You will see at once that the ceremonies, on such a simple occasion, could only be simple themselves, to be at all fitting. A patriotic song or two, by our school children—my remarks—the cementing of the marker in its place—that was all.

"Like you, we are working for a handsomer, worthier memorial; and we hope in a not too distant future to unveil a shaft that will do tardy justice to a long-overlooked genius.

"Yours cordially,

"CARRIE CROSBY FULTON,

"(Mrs. J. A. Fulton)."

(NOTE:—In her address, Mrs. Fulton makes the mistake, as may be clearly observed by the facts hereinbefore stated, of classing Fulton with Fitch. Now Fitch's dream and vision were of his own original inventions and construction, while Fulton's, many years later, were of borrowing, appropriating, and claiming as his own the inventions and discoveries of Fitch and others.)

The Address: "More than a hundred years ago two men dreamed the self-same dream and saw the self-same vision. Each wrought with will of brain—with skill of hand—with joy of heart—to give the world a priceless contribution to its

progress; and this year, the world repays them both. For Robert Fulton—the Pageant on the Hudson; for John Fitch—an Elegy in a Country Graveyard.

“Surely never was there sadder life than this that found its ending here; for none ever merited more truly the hopeless epitaph—‘Lived in vain.’ Child of genius,—his was an unrealized ideal, an unrewarded labor. Patriot,—his country refused him at first, and defrauded him at last. Lover,—he gained a shrewish wife, unfilial children, a wretched home, the solitude of utter abandonment. Ill treated in childhood, neglected in youth, scoffed at in manhood, and deserted in age, life had for him no draught save one of bitterness—no crown save one of thorns.

“The fire of his genius blazed in vain, before eyes too blind to see; the power of his genius wasted itself on minds too dull to comprehend. Broken and spent, weary and disheartened, he turned his back upon the heedless world and crept into this quiet spot to die, sending back to the generation that refused him and his gift, this cry of bitter prophecy: ‘Other men will profit by my invention, and grow rich and famous from it; but poor John Fitch will be forgotten.’

“Not so. Not altogether so. Another’s hand has garnered in the glory which yours sought to grasp, and forever rests the laurel wreath upon another’s brow; but behind the shining glory men see a dawning light, and Fame has written her decree that Fitch’s name shall never pass into oblivion.”

PRIORITY OF INVENTION.

Paper by Mr. Knapp; read by him before the National Navy League
U. S. Convention, Washington, D. C., February 22, 1912.

The discovery, invention and successful application of Steam propulsion of vessels through water, the first in all history, belongs in all honor, and of right, to John Fitch, a native of the town of Windsor (now South Windsor), in the State of Connecticut, U. S. A. Fitch was born January 21, 1743; died July 2, 1798, and was buried in Bardstown, Kentucky.

His invention of the steamboat dates back to April, 1785. With no precedent to aid or guide him, in an untried and unknown field, Fitch conceived the possibilities of steam propulsion of vessels through water, at a time in the world's history when the only known way was by oars, or by sails, and he worked out his problem to a successful application in the construction of his steamboat running on the Delaware river, carrying passengers from Philadelphia to Burlington, New Jersey, under advertised scheduled dates, making over seven miles an hour. Fitch's resources were extremely limited beyond his own earnings.

During the year 1785, practical drawings and models of his Steamboat were submitted to the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, Pa., and Fitch also memorialized Congress to "facilitate the inland navigation of the United States, especially in the waters of the Mississippi, by his invention," and also claimed that his invention would answer for sea voyages as well, and in time would be the mode of crossing the Atlantic for packets and armed vessels.

His model showed the screw propeller, as well as paddles.

In 1786-7 five states—New Jersey, Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia—recognized the value of Fitch's invention and application of steam propulsion of vessels through water, by granting him sole and exclusive rights in their navigable waters for constructing, making and employing or navigating any kind of boat or water craft which should be impelled by the force of fire or steam, in all the creeks, *See Appendix New Jersey Law.*

rivers, etc., within the territory or jurisdiction of the state, for a period of fourteen years.

In 1789 (March 4) upon the formation of the National Government of the United States, all control of the navigable waters of the several states passed over to the United States National Government, and on August 26, 1791, the National Government granted Fitch letters-patent for his steamboat invention, for the term of fourteen years. This document was signed by Washington, and by Jefferson, Knox and Randolph, commissioners.

Such were the beginnings and successful application of Fitch's wonderful invention—the first in the world's history for steam propulsion of vessels through water. Fitch's priority of invention is further evidenced by the Legislative Acts of the State of New York repealing rights granted in 1787 to John Fitch, upon Livingston's petition, and granting rights to Livingston and Fulton, which were subsequently revoked and annulled by the Supreme Court of the United States.

The record evidence is as follows:

*See Appendix,
State Laws,
New York,
Vol. 2, p. 472,
Chap. 57.*

In 1798, nine years after all control of the navigable waters of the State of New York had passed over to the National Government of the United States, Robert R. Livingston petitioned the New York Legislature to repeal the rights granted by a former Legislature, in 1787, to John Fitch, giving him "sole right and advantage of making, and employing for a limited time the steamboat, by him lately invented," which Livingston alleged had become forfeit by death or non use, and that similar rights be extended to him for a period of twenty years. This petition was granted.

*Revision
1801 to 1804
inclusive,
Chap. 94.*

In 1803, Livingston again petitioned the then Legislature of New York, to extend these rights thus obtained in 1798, to embrace Robert Fulton. This petition was also granted, and the time was extended two years from 1803 for them to demonstrate the practicability of their experiments, which, "if successful," the necessary proofs should be submitted to the Commission. The act of April 11, 1808, granted confiscatory penalties.

*Laws of
New York
for 1808, p. 407.*

Livingston and Fulton exercised these so-called "rights" until 1812, when they brought suit against Van Ingen et al., for infringement of these "rights." Livingston and Fulton as plaintiffs in this suit had to allege, and did allege, the priority of Fitch's steamboat invention, and whose rights were repealed in 1798, by the Legislature of New York upon Livingston's petition. Livingston and Fulton subsequently assigned these "rights" thus obtained by them from the Legislatures of the State of New York, to John R. Livingston, and he assigned them to Aaron Ogden of New Jersey. Ogden brought suit against Thomas Gibbons for infringement of these "rights" assigned from Livingston and Fulton, which was decided in his, Ogden's, favor, by the New York Court. Gibbons then appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, and the case was heard at the February term, 1824. Daniel Webster argued the case for the appellant Gibbons. The United States Supreme Court affirmed Mr. Webster's view, that the grants by the New York Legislatures to Livingston and Fulton created a monopoly, hostile to the citizens of States, and was also hostile to the sovereignty of the United States. The Supreme Court decided that these "rights" granted by the Legislatures of the State of New York to Livingston and Fulton for the exclusive navigation of the waters of that state, prohibited vessels licensed by the Laws of the United States, and were repugnant to the Constitution of the United States, and void. The decision of the New York Court was revoked and annulled.

See Appendix, Johnson, New York Reports, Vol. 9, p. 507.

See Appendix, case of Gibbons and Ogden.

See Appendix, Wharton's Report, Vol. 9, p. 23, and Decree U. S. Supreme Court.

Furthermore, neither Livingston nor Fulton claimed priority of Discovery and Invention, only that "on a suggestion by him (Livingston) that he was possessor of a mode of applying the steam engine to propel a boat on new and advantageous principles."

Up to 1803, Livingston and Fulton's experiments had proved fruitless, and the Legislature of New York granted them two years from 1803 to demonstrate the practicability of their experiments, which, "if successful," necessary proofs should be submitted to a commission. Fulton's steamboat, the

See Appendix, Johnson's Law Reports, New York, Vol. 9, p. 507.

"Clermont", was not launched on the Hudson river until August, 1807—twenty years after Fitch's steamboat invention.

Doubtless Fulton, with Livingston's aid, rendered essential service in *developing* the steamboat to make it a commercial success in the field explored by Fitch twenty years before, and opened up to the world.

In summing up, from the record above, evidenced as it is by Fitch's invention, models, correspondence and successful application of his steamboat in the waters of the Delaware river in 1786-90; by grants from five States, including New York, for the "sole and exclusive use" for his steamboat invention in their navigable waters, in 1786-7; by Letters-patent granted Fitch by the U. S. National Government in 1791; by Livingston's declaration of Fitch's priority of invention in his petition to the New York Legislature in 1798 for repeal of rights granted Fitch in 1787 and that similar rights be granted to him, which were subsequently extended to embrace Fulton; by Livingston's and Fulton's allegations as plaintiffs in their suit brought in 1812 against Van Ingen et al. for infringing in these navigable waters, where they alleged Fitch's priority of invention; by Mr. Webster's argument before the Supreme Court of the United States, in the case of Gibbons and Ogden, maintaining Fitch's priority of invention, and also by the decision of the United States Supreme Court in this case in 1824, accepting Mr. Webster's view, and revoking and annulling the several monopoly grants made by the Legislatures of New York to Livingston and Fulton, as being hostile to the sovereignty of the United States.

Such cumulative evidence as here narrated should end all further controversy, and establishes the fact that the priority of invention and successful application of steam propulsion of vessels through water, belongs in all justice and right, to John Fitch, a native of Connecticut.

It is almost inconceivable that the friends of Fulton, and especially the promoters of the Hudson-Fulton Centennial in 1907 of the launching of Fulton's "Clermont" on the Hudson

river, should not have known the history of their own State regarding Fitch's priority of invention of steam propulsion of vessels through water; nor also, that the so-called "rights" in navigable waters, granted by the Legislatures of the State of New York to Livingston and Fulton, were revoked and annulled in 1824 by the Supreme Court of the United States.

It was as truthfully, as wittily said, of the Hudson-Fulton Centennial celebration at New York, in 1907, "that it was a magnificent demonstration by New York City, in honor of one who did not invent the steamboat, and of the other, who did not discover the river."

IN CONCLUSION:—I note from the Autobiography of Rear-Admiral Winfield Scott Schley: "One of the most interesting features of the vicinity of Frederick (Md.), and lying to the northwest of Richfields, was Catoctin furnace, where many of the guns and shot used against the enemy were cast during the Revolutionary War, and used on a number of public and private vessels armed in the state. This furnace has been operated for a period reaching beyond the days of the Revolution. It was there that the first castings of Steamboat machinery were made about 1786 or 1787; they were tried in a steam-vessel experimented with on the Potomac just above the village of Shepardstown, Virginia. This experiment antedated Fulton's *Clermont* and possibly aided him in developing successfully that vessel in 1807. Also at this furnace were rolled the plates used on the *Monitor*, whose fight at Hampton Roads in 1862 revolutionized naval construction all over the world. Indeed, from first to last this old Catoctin furnace, that I used to visit in my boyhood days, has been making history."

FREDERIC KNAPP,

Chairman of Committee.

APPENDIX.

STATE LAWS.

Regarding John Fitch's Invention of Steam Propulsion of Vessels through water.

In 1786-7 five states, New Jersey, Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia granted John Fitch sole and exclusive rights in their navigable waters for steam propulsion of vessels through water.

*New
Jersey.*

Specific law of New Jersey, March 18, 1786, giving Fitch "the sole and exclusive right of constructing, making, using and employing or navigating all and every species or kinds of boats or water craft which might be urged or impelled by the force of fire or steam in all the creeks, rivers, etc., within the territory or jurisdiction of this state for a period of fourteen years."

*New York
Laws,
Vol. 2, p. 472,
Chap. 57.*

"An act for granting and securing to John Fitch the sole right and advantage of making and employing for a limited time the Steamboat by him lately invented.

"Passed the 19th March, 1787.

Preamble—Whereas John Fitch of Bucks County in the state of Pennsylvania, hath represented to the Legislature of this state, that he has constructed an easy and expeditious method of impelling boats through the water by the force of steam, praying that an act may pass granting to him, his executors, administrators and assigns the sole and exclusive right of making, employing and navigating all boats impelled by the force of steam or fire within the jurisdiction of this state for a limited time. Wherefore to promote and encourage so useful an improvement and discovery, and as a reward for his ingenuity, application and diligence. Be it enacted etc."

"An act repealing an act entitled: An act for granting *New York* and securing to John Fitch the sole right and advantage of *Laws, Vol. 4,* making and employing the steamboat by him lately invented" *p. 215, Chap.* and for other purposes. *55.*

"Passed the 27th of March, 1798.

Preamble, Whereas it has been suggested to the people of this state represented by the Senate and Assembly, that Robert R. Livingston is possessor of a mode of applying the steam engine to propel a boat on new and advantageous principles, but that he is deterred from carrying the same into effect by the existence of a law entitled "An act for granting and securing to John Fitch the sole right and advantage of making and employing the steamboat by him lately invented," passed the nineteenth day of March, one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven, as well as by the uncertainty and hazard of a very expensive experiment unless he could be assured of the exclusive advantage of the same, if on trial it should be found to succeed, and

WHEREAS, It is further suggested that the said John Fitch is either dead, or hath withdrawn himself from this state without having made any attempt in the space of more than ten years for executing the plan for which he so obtained an exclusive privilege whereby the same is justly forfeited:

THEREFORE, Be it enacted by the people of the state of *Grant to* New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, that the act *John Fitch* aforesaid be and is hereby repealed. And to the end that *repealed, and* Robert R. Livingston may be induced to proceed in an experi- *similar rights* ment, which if successful, promises important advantages to *granted to* this state, *Robert R. Liv-*
ingston.

BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That privileges similar to those granted to the said John Fitch in, and by the before mentioned act, be, and they are hereby extended to said Robert for the term of twenty years from the passing of this act:

Provided nevertheless, etc."

"An act relative to a steamboat,

"Passed April 5, 1803.

*New York
Laws, Vol. 3,
p. 323.*

*Revision, from
1801 to 1804,
inclusive, Chap.
94.*

"Be it enacted by the people of the state of New York represented in Senate and Assembly, That the rights, privileges, and advantages granted to Robert R. Livingston in and by the act, entitled 'an act repealing an act for granting and securing to John Fitch the sole right and advantage of making and employing the steamboat by him lately invented, and for other purposes, passed the twenty-seventh day of March, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight, be extended to Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton, for the term of twenty years from the passing of this act: And that the time for giving the necessary proof of the practicability of a boat of twenty tons capacity be propelled by steam through the water, with and against the ordinary current of the Hudson River, taken together, four miles an hour, be, and the same is extended to two years from the passing of this act."

An act for the further encouragement of Steamboats on the waters of this State and for other purposes.

Passed April 11, 1808.

*Laws of
New York,
31st Session,
1808, p. 407.*

I. Be it enacted by the people of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly. That whenever Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton, and such persons as they may associate with them, shall establish one or more Steamboats or vessels, other than that already established, they shall, for each and every such additional boat be entitled to five years' prolongation of their grant or contract with this State: Provided, nevertheless, That the whole term of their exclusive privileges shall not exceed thirty years after the passage of this act.

II. And be it further enacted. That no person or persons without the license of the persons entitled to an exclusive right to navigate the waters of this State, with boats moved by steam or fire, or those holding a major part of the interest in such privilege, shall set in motion, or navigate upon the waters of this State, or within the jurisdiction thereof, any boat or vessel

moved by steam or fire; and the said person or persons, so navigating with boats or vessels moved by steam or fire, in contravention of the exclusive right of the said Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton, and their associates, or legal representatives, shall forfeit such boat, or boats and vessels, together with the engine, tackle and apparel thereof, to the said Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton, and their associates.

CASE OF GIBBONS AND OGDEN, UNITED STATES
SUPREME COURT, FEBRUARY TERM, 1824.

Aaron Ogden of New Jersey, filed his bill in the Court of Impeachment and Corrections of the state of New York to authorize the Chancellor to award an injunction against Thomas Gibbons for infringement of navigation rights (originally granted by the state of New York to John Fitch) assigned from Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton through John R. Livingston to Ogden. The Court so awarded. Thomas Gibbons appealed the case to the Supreme Court of the United States and was heard at the February term, 1824. Daniel Webster appeared for the appellant, Gibbons. Mr. Webster, in a long and exhaustive argument claimed (among other points) that the repeal of the original rights granted by the state of New York in 1787 to John Fitch for his steamboat invention, and the granting of similar rights to Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton years after the control of the navigable waters of New York had passed over to the United States Government, created a monopoly with confiscatory penalties; a monopoly not only hostile to the other citizens of New York state, and to the citizens of all the other states, but was hostile to the sovereignty of the United States, and was null and void.

*Mr. Webster's
Argument.*

GIBBONS v OGDEN.
Decree, 9th Wheaton 240.

This cause came on to be heard on the transcript of the record of the court of the State of New York for the trial of

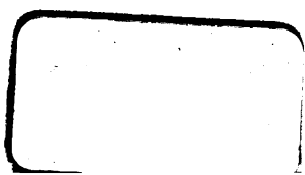
impeachments and correction of errors and was argued by counsel. On consideration whereof this court is of opinion that the several licenses to the steamboats the Stoudinger and the Bellona to carry on the coasting trade which are set up by the appellant Thomas Gibbons in his answer to, the bill of the respondent Aaron Ogden, filed in the court of chancery for the state of New York which were granted under an act of congress passed in pursuance of the constitution of the United States gave full authority to those vessels to navigate the waters of the United States by steam or otherwise for the purpose of carrying on the coasting trade, any law of the state of New York to the contrary notwithstanding: and that so much of the several laws of the state of New York as prohibits vessels licensed according to the laws of the United States from navigating the waters of the State of New York, by means of fire or steam is repugnant to the said constitution and void. This court is therefore of opinion that the decree of the court of New York for the trial of impeachments and the correction of, errors affirming the decree of the chancellor of that state which perpetually enjoins the said Thomas Gibbons the appellant from navigating the waters of the state of New York with the steamboats the Stoudinger and the Bellona by steam or fire is erroneous and ought to, be reversed, and the same is hereby reversed and annulled. And this court does further direct order and decree that the bill of the said Aaron Ogden be dismissed and the same is hereby dismissed accordingly.

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Mss of Felch's autograph
in Bethel. Library
Dickinson. Fulton Ms 130

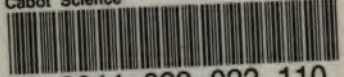
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